

Gateway Inc. Co-Founder Dies At Age 53

SIOUX CITY, Iowa (AP) — Mike Hammond, who co-founded computer maker Gateway in an Iowa farmhouse in 1985 and helped turn it into an American success story by shipping PCs straight to customers in boxes with a spotted-cow design, has died at age 53.

Hammond died Thursday at his home in Sioux City, Iowa, funeral director Korey Robinson with the Meyer Brothers Funeral Home said Monday.

Hammond started Gateway Inc. with brothers Ted and Norm Waitt, selling what became among the most popular computers on the market. The success was short-lived, though, in the fast-changing computer industry.

The firm began by selling components for Texas Instruments computers out of a farmhouse on a cattle farm that Waitt's family owned outside Sioux City in northwest Iowa. The Gateway brand of computers began shipping directly to consumers a few years later.

In 1991, the company started shipping its computers in distinctive containers decorated with cow spots.

Hammond helped manage the company's operations in Iowa and South Dakota. After retiring from Gateway, he started Dakota Muscle to restore and repair classic cars.

Gateway struggled as more players entered the personal computer business and profit margins shrank. The company tried to expand into consumer electronics and opened retail stores, but didn't succeed there.

It went from 24,600 employees in 2000 to 1,800 after it started closing the stores in 2001 and refocusing on its core computer business.

Then in 2007, Gateway was sold to Taiwanese company Acer Inc. for \$710 million. Only a handful of employees remain at Gateway's North Sioux City, South Dakota, operation.

Islamic Center In Omaha Vandalized

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Another vandal has targeted the Islamic Center in Omaha.

A security camera caught an image of a masked man unsuccessfully trying to break the glass in a door around 3:15 a.m. on Thursday. Early on Aug. 23 a vandal heaved a 40-pound boulder through the glass in what mosque officials said was the first attack in 20 years. No arrests or injuries have been reported in either incident.

The center's president, Mohammed Rasheed, told Omaha television station KMTV that center officials believe these are hate crimes, because for someone to go to the center so early in the morning to "pick up a stone and throw it, they would have to plan and be motivated to do that."

Woman Sentenced In Cop-Killing Case

ATLANTA (AP) — A judge has sentenced a Georgia woman to home confinement and probation after she admitted lying when she bought a gun that her boyfriend used to kill a Nebraska police officer.

A judge on Tuesday sentenced Jalita Johnson to a year's probation, 180 days of home confinement and community service.

Federal prosecutors say Johnson in April bought a Glock semiautomatic gun, a 50-round drum magazine and ammunition from a pawnshop.

Johnson wrote on the purchase form that she was buying the gun for herself. She later admitted she was buying it on behalf of her boyfriend Marcus Wheeler, a convicted felon.

Police in Omaha say Wheeler killed Kerrie Orozco on May 20 when he opened fire on officers trying to arrest him. Wheeler was killed when another officer returned fire.

SD Panel Might Propose Ag-Land Assessment Change

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — The continuing push to ensure long-standing grasslands are taxed at fair rates in South Dakota rose to the top again Monday for the Legislature's task force on agricultural property assessments.

The panel also is considering asking for money for an update of soil ratings statewide.

Soil ratings are the foundation for South Dakota's productivity-based system for determining taxable values of crop and non-crop lands.

Depending on the area, agricultural land provides much of the tax revenue to pay for county government services and public schools, especially in South Dakota's many rural counties.

Fall River County director of equalization Susie Simkins testified Monday that approximately 36,000 grass acres in her county are taxed well above their actual productivity.

That is because they are used for grazing but have crop-rated soils.

Simkins urged that each soil type have ratings for crops and grass.



Peterson

"You're charging him for corn when he's growing cows, and I don't think that's fair," she said.

The task force is considering whether to offer legislation that would guarantee land that has been in grass for at least 40 years couldn't be assessed as cropland regardless of the soil type.

The decision whether to offer that measure and several others for the 2016 legislative session will come Dec. 7 when the panel meets for the final time this year.

Some farming organizations have fought against that type of protection in the past because tax burden would somewhat shift from grass acres to crop acres.

Sen. Jim Peterson, D-Revillo, has sought protection of grass acres for much of the past decade because taxes can be incentive for producers to plow up grass and convert to crops. He is serving as chairman of the task force this year.

"We appreciate all the hard work you have done. Your commissioners should

be proud of you," Peterson told Simkins.

Another of the measures facing the task force would appropriate \$175,000 for South Dakota State University to update soil ratings for the first time since about 1995.

The task force uses SDSU as its consultant for the soil-based assessment system.

SDSU assistant professor Matthew Elliott suggested that county assessors could use a rubric of nine factors, covering whether a use is physically possible, financially feasible and able to achieve maximum profit.

He said the grid would allow for local flexibility based on a parcel's actual conditions while providing a consistent framework statewide.

Elliott said Douglas Malo, a soil science professor at SDSU, would conduct research for updating the soils' potential ratings, while Elliott would lead the economics research regarding financial feasibility and maximizing profits.

"We have many methods and analysis that we've done in the past," Elliott said. "So we can certainly do that with the soil (rating) tables."

Nebraska

ConAgra Selling Its Private Label Unit To Treehouse Foods

NEW YORK (AP) — ConAgra Foods Inc. is selling most of its private-label operations to TreeHouse Foods Inc. for about \$2.7 billion as part its plan to focus more on name brands including Chef Boyardee and Slim Jim.

Omaha-based ConAgra first announced plans to sell the unit in June and the deal is expected to close in the first quarter. It will keep some minor private label operations including its canned pasta, cooking spray, peanut butter and pudding offerings.

Oak Brook, Illinois-based TreeHouse Foods, which already focuses on store-brand food products, said it expects the newly acquired operations to boost its annual sales to nearly \$7 billion.

It will also boost the

company's employee base to more than 16,000 people and give it a total of more than 50 manufacturing facilities.

TreeHouse CEO Sam Reed said ConAgra tried to manage the private-label businesses with the same team that oversaw its branded foods, and the private label unit suffered.

He said he expects the businesses to fare better because his company focuses only on private-label products and has developed a successful strategy to vary its products for different customers and markets.

"We're fortunate that its present value is a 60 percent discount to where it was," Reed said in an interview.

Citi analyst David Driscoll called the acquisition "a homerun for TreeHouse."

The deal comes one month after ConAgra said it will cut 1,500 jobs, or about 30 percent of its office-based workforce, and move its headquarters to Chicago from Omaha, Nebraska. The restructuring moves are part of the company's plan to make the company leaner and develop products to meet changing consumer tastes as people seem to seek out healthier and less-processed foods.

ConAgra had been facing pressure from major stockholder Jana Partners, which said ConAgra's results have been disappointing since it bought store brand business Ralcorp for \$5 billion two years ago.

ConAgra, which also makes Hebrew National hot dogs, Jiffy Pop, and Bertolli prod-

ucts, reported a first-quarter loss of \$1.2 billion.

Meanwhile, ConAgra expects to have about 700 workers in Chicago by next summer, including top executives and it will keep about 1,200 employees in Omaha to handle research and development, supply chain management and some administrative functions. About 1,000 people will lose their jobs in Omaha and roughly 300 Omaha jobs will move to Chicago.

Overall, it expects about \$345 million in one-time charges over the next two to three years related to the restructuring.

Shares of ConAgra rose 36 cents to \$40.91 Monday while TreeHouse Foods Inc. shares fell \$4.80, or 5.6 percent, to \$80.84.

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